

Our Work –

Agriculture Lobby Page -

The food that we eat connects each of us to the world of agriculture. Farmers and livestock producers in every country are responsible for most of the supply of food that goes through grocery stores and markets in towns and cities. Fishing and forestry, too, provide food and fiber important for daily life. In developing countries, many farm families grow crops and raise animals for their own consumption. Increasingly, though, even in developing countries, rural producers are finding it profitable to grow grains, vegetables, and fruits or harvest shrimp and fish that find ready customers in distant regional or global markets.

Farmers and other rural producers in developing countries must continually increase the efficiency, or productivity, of their farms or animal operations. By increasing the number of tons of foodgrains produced on each acre of farmland, for example, farmers can assure that food supplies are increased enough to meet the needs of a growing population without running out of available land or irrigation water. By increasing the value of their production through their choice of crops (tomatoes, for example, command a higher price than corn), or by lowering the cost of production (by using high-yielding varieties of seeds and fertilizer), rural producers are better able to sell their output on local, regional or world markets on a competitive basis. They also earn incomes which will make it possible for them to continue to invest in their farming or livestock operations and improve the efficiency of their production still further.

Increased agricultural productivity is an important goal for USAID in nearly all the countries in which we work. More than a billion people today live on less than a dollar a day, and about 70 percent of these people live in rural areas and spend all or part of their time farming or raising livestock. Some also fish or extract wood and other products from the forests. But even though food production is their business, they often do not produce enough even for their own families and many of them go to bed hungry every night. The challenge of making the agricultural sector much more productive is a critical one.

Government policies must support the ability of farmers and other rural producers to improve their production. Policies with regard to land ownership, trade, access to water or other shared natural resources, and transport are important for agricultural production and marketing. Governments must also support research to search for new agricultural technologies (including improved seeds) and, often, outreach and extension services that give information about the new technologies to producers who need them.

Agribusiness, however, is largely responsible for shaping agricultural markets, processing products into different forms for different consumers, and assuring a timely flow of agricultural inputs and financing to support producers. Agricultural cooperatives are often a useful form of farmer-owned business that enables small farmers to realize some of the benefits generally associated with larger-scale businesses.

USAID works with all participants in agricultural development to support efforts to increase productivity ...from farmers and their organizations (including cooperatives) to scientists working to develop new, more productive varieties; from agribusinesses seeking to develop new, profitable markets to governments providing the sound legal framework within which businesses can operate; from the schools and universities that train future farmers and businesspeople to the research labs where scientists develop new technologies; and from local communities working to manage their available natural resources for sustainable production to regional organizations seeking to lower barriers to trade between countries.